

SOCIAL AND SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

397

form of interest in it is one of dramatic representation, yet . . . this does not prevent him from getting direct actual experience of physical processes. Physical events become, in fact, the test and measure of reality. There is no wheedling or cajoling or bullying or deceiving *them*. Their answer is *yes* or *no*, and remains the same to-day as yesterday. It is surely they that wean the child from personal schemas, and give content to 'objectivity' ¹² (p. 79). This growing knowledge of the real physical world with its impersonality and stability must itself be a great aid to the child in attaining objectivity with regard to people also.

(12) The confluence of these various psychological processes, accumulating their effect from the first year of infancy to round about six, gradually changes the superficialities of the child's behaviour so markedly that he does appear to enter upon a quite different psychological phase.

One of the chief characteristics of the child over six or seven is his wish to understand what is real and true. But this interest in reality itself rests upon another change which takes place on far deeper levels, namely, the *repression* of his central conflict with regard to his parents. Between the years (roughly) of four and six, the child's most intense sexual wishes and resulting aggression towards his parents undergo a very deep repression.² He thus turns away from his parents to other children for emotional satisfactions. Thereafter, as we have seen, he is (consciously) far more occupied with the feelings and opinions of other children towards himself than with the opinions and feelings of his parents. This is not, of course, a sudden change, but covers the space of a year or two, or even longer. But it

does suffice to make

* The impersonal world indeed very often comes to have for the child so much and so precisely this significance of stability that in moments of great emotional stress he will, as it were, take a part of the physical world into himself, or attempt to model himself upon it, just because it is so unchanging and solid and unaffected by feelings. If one is, for example, a wall or a chair, one cannot be blamed for being stupid ; nor can one be hurt, because one is dead. If one is already dead then one cannot be killed ; so it is sometimes safer to be unfeeling, unchanging and dead like a physical object. (See M. N. Searl, "A Note on Depersonalization," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, Vol. XIII, Part 3, 1932.)

² It is probable that at any rate to some extent this is phylogenetically determined, and not only an outcome of those various other processes and changes we have been examining.